

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

People of the Bible

GOD'S PROPHETS

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you. Always read your Bible first, then read these notes. Check the references and read them also. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

From the beginning, God chose men of faith to speak for Him. He put His Spirit on these special witnesses and gave them words to speak. God chose both men and women of faith to be His prophets. Sometimes God spoke to His prophets directly and at other times He spoke to them by dreams or in visions.

When God's prophets spoke they said, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken" or "the Lord Almighty has revealed this in my hearing..." (Isa 22:14). When no message came from God, the prophets did not speak. Ezekiel said God sealed his mouth (Ezek 3:26-27). The message was always greater than the messenger.

At times God asked His prophets to do unusual and strange things. He asked them to act out His message. Jeremiah wore a yoke around his neck to show the bondage that a foreign power would bring on the people because of their sins (Jer 27:2). Ezekiel acted out the siege of Jerusalem (Ezek 4).

Prophets called the people back from their wandering ways and challenged them to seek the Lord and worship Him only (Deut 6:5). The people did not always like what the prophets said. God told young Jeremiah, "They will fight against you, but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you" (Jer 1:19). God stood by His prophets to protect them.

The prophet told the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, "Turn from your evil ways, each one of you..." They replied, "Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah."

These people of Jerusalem stood against God's truth as Jeremiah presented it to them. The words used here help us distinguish between the three parts of the Old Testament Scriptures:

- a) The teachings of the law.
- b) Counsel from the wise.
- c) Words from the prophets (Jer 18:18).

TALK ABOUT:

1. Who were the prophets?
2. What did the prophets do?
3. Can you name three different parts of the Old Testament (Jer 18:18)?
4. Did God tell His prophets to do strange things?
5. Did God's prophets speak their own words?

THE PROPHETS STUDIED GOD'S MESSAGE

Peter said the prophets "searched intently and with the greatest care..." what God said to them (1 Peter 1:10). They wrote God's words on scrolls and studied them carefully. They listened for God's Spirit to teach them. When they had no message from God they did not speak.

God controlled their pens and directed their thoughts as they wrote. God's Spirit was with them. He was the sole author of the history of salvation as it is recorded in the Bible (Heb 12:2).

There are three groups of prophetic books in the Old Testament.

1. Moses, Joshua, Judges and Samuel all spoke God's message to the people of Israel. They are sometimes called "the Former Prophets."
2. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are called "the Major Prophets."
3. The twelve books that are placed after the Major Prophets are called "the Minor Prophets."

There were many other great prophets who spoke for God like Elisha and Elijah. Some appeared briefly and gave the people God's word. Other men like Nathan and Gad were probably more like court chaplains (2 Sam 7:10-16).

The Bible writers refer to the prophets by various names:

- a) Man of God (1 Sam 9:6).
- b) Seer (1 Sam 9:9).
- c) Man of the Spirit (Hos 9:7).
- d) Watchman (Ezek 33:7).

All God's prophets were chosen by Him and set apart to live holy lives and speak His words to the people. God told young Jeremiah, "I knew you before you were born...I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). The prophets spoke to their own generation. Their message had a deep meaning for those around them. Some of Jeremiah's prophecies were against the sins of that day. Some told of the judgments of God that would come upon Judah and Jerusalem because they did not obey God. Other prophecies were against the heathen nations.

Because the prophet's messages were the living words of the eternal God, they not only spoke to those people who lived long ago, but also speak to us who are living now "upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor 10:11 KJV).

TALK ABOUT

1. Did the prophets write and study God's words?
2. How do we group the prophets?
3. Can you name some of the great prophets of God?
4. Do you tell God's message to others?

WOMEN WHO WERE PROPHETS

Women played an important part in the ministry of God's word. They were sometimes called 'prophetess.' We find the names of these women in different parts of the Bible.

Miriam, sister of Aaron, is called "Miriam, the prophetess" (Ex 15:20). She led the women in singing and dancing after the victory of the Red Sea. The prophet Micah said she was a leader in Israel (Micah 6:4). Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses' authority by asking, "Has not the Lord spoken through us" (Num 12:1-2).

Deborah was a judge in Israel after the people entered the Promised Land. The writer of Judges said, "Deborah, the prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time" (Judges 4:4).

Huldah was a prophetess in the days of the Kings of Israel. When the priests cleaned the Temple they found a lost scroll. They believed it was part of the law of Moses, but they were not sure. Some of the leading court officials took the scroll to Huldah the prophetess to ask her about it (2 Kings 22:14). She said to them, "Tell the men who sent you to me, 'This is what the Lord says: ...'" And she gave them a message from God for the King, Josiah (2 Kings 22:16-20).

In the New Testament Luke wrote about an aged woman named Anna, "There was also a prophetess, Anna...who never left the Temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying" (Luke 2:36-37). Luke said that Philip, the evangelist had "four unmarried daughters who prophesied..." (Acts 21:8-9). The word 'prophesied' means they ministered in public (1 Cor 11:5). This proves that gifted women played an important role serving the Lord in the early Christian Church.

TALK ABOUT

1. Can you name some prophets who were women?
2. Can you name any other prophets?
3. Did gifted women serve in the early Church (Acts 21:8-9)?
4. Why is it important for all Christians to study what the prophets wrote?

THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE

The prophet's message was meant to make people more aware of God:

- a) His holiness (Isa 6:1-6).
- b) His majesty and splendour (Ezek 1:1-14).
- c) His divine tenderness and love (Jer 31:3).
- d) His desire to redeem man from sin and bring them into His rest (Deut 30:19; 1 Kings 18:21; Isa 11:10).

This greater understanding of who God is, His purpose for men and women and what He requires of us was intended to lead men to repent and seek forgiveness (Isa 55:6).

Each prophet had a personal experience of God. The Holy Spirit came upon the prophet and gave him or her the wisdom of God. But all the prophets' messages came from the same God Almighty. This is the reason for the unity of the Scriptures. It is not made up of many parts, but is one whole.

A TIME OF GREAT TROUBLE

The eighth century before Christ (BC) was a time of great trouble and many wars. God sent His prophets to both the northern tribes, called Israel and the southern tribes, called Judah with Jerusalem as its chief city. Amos and Hosea spoke God's word to the northern tribes. Isaiah and Micah proclaimed the word of the Lord to the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

This movement of the Spirit of God through His prophets continued for a full 300 years. As a result a large part of written prophecy was recorded. This revelation of God reached far beyond the messengers of that time. It became an important part of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus drew from the prophets' writings to instruct the people during his time on earth. And the whole Christian Church is blessed to have the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament. Sadly, few study them as they should.

During this long period, pure worship of the true God was almost lost. Many Jews offered sacrifices at local pagan shrines (Amos 4:4; Micah 6:6). Heathen priests stood against God's prophets. One told Amos, "Get out, you seer. Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there" (Amos 7:12).

God raised up a leader here and a king there who began to cleanse the land of these heathen shrines, but idolatry continued. God was angry with His people (Jer 17:4).

A remnant of faithful souls waited for God to act. They looked for a time when God would come to their aid. Amos said this was a false hope (Amos 5:18) The Day of the Lord would be a day of darkness and judgment not of light.

TALK ABOUT

1. Were God's prophets treated kindly?
2. What did Amos say about "the day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18)?

FALSE PROPHETS

Whenever God presents His truth, Satan tells men and women there is a better way. Satan finds men without faith in God and puts a lying spirit in them (Jer 14:14).

God told Jeremiah, "The prophets are prophesying lies in My name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying...false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds" (Jer 14:14).

Jeremiah called such men "false shepherds" and warned, "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture," declares the Lord (Jer 23:1).

Many false prophets led the people to worship the idol Baal. God said, "they prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray. And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie" (Jer 23:13-14).

Jesus warned the people, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt 7:15-16). Jesus said false prophets can be recognized by the way they live. Their lives do not glorify God.

TALK ABOUT

1. Who gives false prophets words to speak (2 Tim 3:16)?
2. What did Jesus say about false prophets (Matt 7:15)?

CHRIST, THE GOAL OF ALL PROPHECY

Many great prophetic messages, from the earliest prophecy by Moses, looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ into the World (Gal 4:4). He came and brought light and blessing to the whole world, especially to the men and women who put their faith in His message (John 5:24).

God said through His servant Moses, "I will raise up for them (Israel) a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put My words in his mouth" (Deut 18:15,18).

This prophecy not only referred to the long line of prophets who succeeded Moses, it also referred to the coming of Messiah Christ.

Peter used these same words to show that Jesus Christ fulfilled Moses' prophecy (Acts 3:22-23).

Isaiah set out the ministry of God's Servant, Jesus Christ. He said the chosen Servant would "preach the good news to the poor...bind up the brokenhearted...proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Isa 61:1).

Jesus stood up in the Jewish synagogue in Nazareth and read this prophecy about Himself. Then He said to the people, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:14-21).

The prophet said, "In that day (the time of Christ's ministry) the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious" (Isa 11:10).

It took Paul, writing to the Christians in Rome, to explain the meaning of Isaiah's words. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, One who will rise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in Him" (Rom 15:12).

Christ was born, the son of David, son of Jesse. His gospel spread far and wide and many people who were not Jews believed. He rules in the hearts of His people by His Spirit. Paul saw Jesus Christ, the Son of God, ruling over the 'nations' or peoples of the world which would accept the gospel.

Paul wrote to believers, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..." We enter the place of His rest when we trust Him fully. And His glorious rest in heaven awaits all who love Him (Col 3:15; John 14:2-3).

TALK ABOUT

1. Who was the "Root of Jesse" (Isa 11:10)?
2. What is the great hope of all who love Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:4)?
3. What is the goal of your life?
4. Are you reaching your potential for God?

THE PROPHETS SEARCHED TO KNOW MORE

Peter wrote, "The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you (in Christ), searched intently and with the greatest care..." (1 Peter 1:10).

What was the subject of the prophets' search?

"They were trying to find out the time and the circumstances" of Christ's suffering and future glory. What amazed them most was that their coming Messiah would suffer so at the hands of wicked men.

God had long promised His people a Messiah who would deliver them from the hands of their enemies. But they looked for a political leader and a physical deliverance from the power of Rome. Even Christ's disciples made that mistake. They asked the Risen Lord, "Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6)?

Jesus did not answer their question but directed them to the coming of the Holy Spirit. He said, "It is not for you to know the time or the dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

God revealed to these disciples what He had revealed to His prophets a long time ago: "That they were not serving themselves but you..." God saved them to witness for Him and to serve others.

JESUS MET TWO DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD

Again, when Jesus spoke to the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, He showed them how the prophets' words looked forward to His coming and ministry (Luke 24:13-35).

Many prophecies foretold Christ's birth, ministry, suffering and death (Luke 24:25; Acts 8:26-35).

Only by studying the Old Testament can we understand the prophecies of:

- a) The coming King and His Kingdom (2 Sam 7:12-13).
- b) The suffering Servant (Isa 53).
- c) The wonderful Counselor (Isa 9:6).
- d) The believer's inheritance (Isa 60:21).

The New Testament fulfillment of the prophecies makes them even more plain. With the prophets we can look forward to coming events. And with the apostles, we can examine their historical fulfillment of these same events.

In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son (Heb 1:2). Jesus Christ brought to us God's last word. He revealed the Father as no prophet could.

TALK ABOUT

1. What did the prophets search to find out (1 Peter 1:10)?
2. What did Jesus Christ say He came to do (Luke 4:18-19)?
3. Have you asked Him to set you free from the grip of sin?
4. Do you search the Scriptures?

WAITING FOR THE PROMISED MESSIAH

In the dark days when Israel turned away from God's truth, a faithful remnant of believers stood firm. They waited for some word from the Lord and they were not disappointed. Their Heavenly Father reassured them through many wonderful promises. These promises made their faith stronger and gave them hope.

There were some prophecies which spoke about the coming spiritual Kingdom when there would be peace in men's hearts by faith in Jesus Christ. Isaiah gave the picture of men "beating swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Isa 2:4).

Other prophecies spoke of the Christian Church, when redeemed men and women from every tongue, tribe and nation would come together as one body (Rev 7:9). Then God's house would be called "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa 56:7).

However, many prophecies spoke about the end time when God's word, the gospel of the Kingdom, would be preached to all peoples (Matt 24:14). Then Jesus Christ will come in the clouds, judge the world and bring in a "new heavens and a new earth" (Matt 24:30-31; Isa 66:22; Rev 21:1-7).

It was these great prophecies that caused Zechariah to worship and proclaim, "He (God) has raised up a horn of salvation (Jesus Christ) for us in the house of His servant David (as He said through His holy prophets of long ago)..." (Luke 1:68).

TALK ABOUT

1. What puzzled the prophets?
2. Who did Jesus meet on the road (Luke 24:13-35)?
3. When Jesus comes again in the clouds, what will He do (1 Thess 4:16-18)?

CHRIST, GOD'S FINAL WORD TO MEN

The writer of Hebrews tells us, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son...." (Heb 1:1-2). Jesus Christ came from heaven and brought us God's final word. All God promises of good, spoken by His prophets, were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christ was God's final revelation to men and women.

Christ came and died on the cross to save men and women from their sins. With His last breath Jesus said, "It is finished." (John 19:30). Nothing more can be done to what Jesus has already done.

As Jesus walked through Galilee and Judea, He spoke to the people. He healed their sicknesses and told them about the Kingdom of God. When He spoke, He often used the words of the prophets. He confirmed that what they said was true.

He said the prophets spoke of His suffering and glory (Luke 24:25-26). He said to the two disciples He met on the road to Emmaus, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

Yes, we can trust God's prophets because they spoke the words of God. Their words told about the coming Saviour; His great work of redemption and His coming again (1 Thess 4:16-18).

TALK ABOUT

1. Who gave God's last word to men (Heb 1:1)?

A KINGDOM OF THE SPIRIT

The prophets understood that the Kingdom of God would be a kingdom of the Spirit. It would not be a physical kingdom. It would be an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:12-13). Even Christ's disciples failed to understand this (Acts 1:6-8). Nothing in this world lasts forever except the spirits of men and women.

Jeremiah saw that God would bring in a New Covenant. God said, "I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel.... I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts, declares the Lord" (Jer 31:33; Ezek 11:19).

THE PROPHET JOEL

The prophet Joel was even more specific. He spoke God's promise: "And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people (of faith)...And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mt Zion...there will be deliverance..." (Joel 2:28,32).

On the Day of Pentecost, God poured out His Spirit on the believers (Acts 2:2-4). Peter declared, "This is what was spoken by Joel the prophet, 'In the last days...I will pour out My Spirit on all people...And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Acts 2:17,21).

Physical signs and symbols in the Old Testament became spiritual realities in the New Testament. When speaking of the resurrection of the body Paul said, "The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual" (1 Cor 15:46).

TALK ABOUT

1. Who brought us God's final revelation of Himself (Heb 1:1)?
2. Were people expecting the Messiah to come?
3. When the prophets spoke of God's Kingdom, were they speaking of a physical kingdom?
4. Where is God's Kingdom?

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

God told Moses, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob (the people of Israel)... 'If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' " (Ex 19:3-6).

God directed His people to a kingdom of priests, where each person worshipped God and presented themselves holy unto the Lord. He had shown these people His power and majesty when He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. This was a physical deliverance, but it also expressed God's great desire to deliver our hearts from sin and idolatry.

The people of Israel knew God wanted them to be a holy people who worshipped Him only (Deut 6:5).

When some in Israel asked Aaron to make them a golden calf, and they bowed down to it, God was ready to destroy the whole nation. But Moses stood before God and pleaded for the people and God listened to Moses (Ex 32:9 -14). God spared the people of Israel because He is full of mercy. He wanted them to be His witnesses in the earth and show forth His love and mercy to all peoples (Deut 7:7-10). He is ever patient with us (2 Peter 3:9).

THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOUR

The people of Israel did not obey the Lord or follow the commands He gave them through His servant Moses. God gave them His law, but they did not keep it. Their hearts continually turned away from their Creator. Jeremiah declared, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer 17:9).

The prophets called for a 'new day.' They knew God was about to do something new and different - to "write His laws on the hearts" of men and women. He would give them His Holy Spirit to dwell within them and give them power to obey (Jer 31:31-34).

Isaiah called this new time in history "the year of the Lord's favour" (Isa 61:1). God would send His Servant to proclaim this wonderful time in the history of the world.

Jesus Christ declared that this time of God's favour had come. He stood in the synagogue at Nazareth and read the words of the prophet Isaiah. Then He said to the people, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:14-21).

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). Today is your opportunity, tomorrow may be too late!

Paul also spoke to the believers. He wanted their behaviour to show they had God's law written on their hearts.

TALK ABOUT

1. What did God want His people to do in the world?
2. Why did Israel fail to do God's will (Heb 3:16-19)?
3. When the people asked Aaron to make a golden calf idol, what did Moses do (Ex 32:9-14)?
4. Why did God spare the people (2 Peter 3:9)?

THE LAST GREAT PROPHET

The prophet Malachi said this about God's final day of judgment: "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace....But for you who revere My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings...See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Mal 4:1-5).

Isaiah also prophesied about the coming of the last great prophet, John the Baptist (Isa 40:3). John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," the prophet of God who called down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-38).

John the Baptist came to make ready for Jesus' ministry. He came to call men and women to repent and receive the coming Messiah (Mark 1:1-3). John told the crowds who came out to hear him, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matt 3:2). When men and women repented and confessed their sins, John baptized them in the Jordan River (Matt 3:6).

Jesus said that John was like no other prophet. He said, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist..." (Matt 11:11).

The Pharisees taught that the prophet Elijah would reappear on the earth and speak to the people. The three disciples who were with Jesus when He was transfigured saw Elijah and Moses speaking with Christ on the mountain. Then Elijah and Moses vanished from their sight, only Christ remained with them (Matt 17:1-9).

As they came down the mountain Jesus warned them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Jesus always spoke of Himself as "Son of Man."

The disciples replied, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they (the teachers of the law) did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished" (Matt 17:11-13). Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist.

GOD'S THRONE OF MERCY IS OPEN

God's throne of mercy had always been open to penitent sinners, but they could not come directly into His presence. Sinful men and women could only approach a holy God through a mediator. Only the High Priest of Israel came before God. He stood between God and the people. And only the priests whom God had appointed could minister on behalf of the people.

All that changed when Christ died and rose again from the dead. The great curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. Before Christ death, the curtain shut men out from God. Now the way was open for all who repented of their sin to come into God's presence.

God says to all who love Him, "Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb 4:16).

TALK ABOUT

1. What did John the Baptist come to do?
2. Did any prophet in the Old Testament tell about John's coming and ministry (Mal 4:5)?

3. What did Jesus say about John (Matt 11:11-14)?

REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS

God always had people who loved Him and told of His love and mercy. No matter where, anyone who heard God's call could repent and receive forgiveness for his or her sins.

All through the ages, the most unlikely people received God's grace and were received into His Kingdom. One of these was Rahab the harlot who lived on the wall in the city of Jericho.

When Rahab heard of the wonders God had done in Egypt, her heart was strangely warmed. Faith in God started to replace the faith she had in her worthless idols.

When she offered to help the Israeli spies, at the risk of her life and the lives of her family, faith blossomed and she joined God's people (Joshua 6).

NOW IS THE TIME OF OPPORTUNITY

Paul preached one of his greatest sermons in the city of Athens, Greece. Athens was a pagan city full of idols. Paul told the people about the true God:

- a) God is self-existent and does not need anyone (Acts 17:25).
- b) God created the world and everything in it.
- c) He is the giver of life and the keeper of His creation.
- d) God is judge of all men.
- e) He commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:31).

Paul's final appeal to all who listened to him could be summed up in the words "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Peter put it this way: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

TALK ABOUT

1. What did the prophet call the time we live in (Isa 61:2)?
2. What does God command all men and women to do (Acts 16:31)?
3. Who is the way, the truth and the life, the only way to heaven (John 14:6)?
4. Have you received Jesus Christ as your Saviour (John 5:24)?
5. Are you a witness of Him?

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